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AUTHOR Ljosa, Erling
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ABSTRACT

The historical traditions, organizational structures, funding, and public and academic esteem of the correspondence school and the campus-based regional college are all very different. Nevertheless, the relationship of the two institutions in Norway illustrates that they can form an association that is advantageous to both. Norway's largest correspondence school, Norsk Korrespondanseskole (NKS), began a program of formal cooperation with Rogaland distriktshogskole (RDH) in 1981, when the two institutions reached an agreement to develop a distance education program covering the 10 compulsory subject modules of the RDH business administration program. Although student enrollment is not increasing uniformly in all of the distance modules, the program has benefited both institutions. NKS has also been cooperating with Telemark laererhogskole (TLH), a regional teachers college, to provide distance instruction to teachers needing training in using microcomputers. The basic philosophy underlying both of these cooperative efforts is that of combining existing resources for distance study. The competence and administrative apparatus for distance education already in place at the correspondence school are combined with the academic resources of the two regional colleges. The result is an ability to provide much greater flexibility than is possible with only campus-based education. (MN)

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ERLING LJOSÅ
NORSK KORRESPONDANSESKOLE
NORWAY

THE SYMBIOSIS OF DISTANCE - AND CAMPUS-BASED EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (-IS IT POSSIBLE?)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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DISSIMILAR ANIMALS

An ordinary correspondence school and a campus-based regional college of postsecondary education are indeed two dissimilar educational institutions. Their historical traditions, their organizational structures, their funding and other economic frame factors, their public and academic esteem - are all very different.

Nevertheless, I want to discuss the symbiosis of such different institutions based on a couple of examples from Norway.

In biology, symbiosis means

> "The living together in intimate association of two dissimilar animals, two dissimilar plants, or an animal and plant, ordinarily in an association advantageous, or often necessary, to one or both."

How can such a relationship become established between a correspondence school and a campus-based regional college?

Let us first look at the two animals separately, and then see how they may form an advantageous association.

The correspondence school

The school I am talking about, is NKS. It is the biggest correspondence school in Norway, with 80 000 new course enrollments each year. The students may study individually, and choose among more than 250 courses. Or they can join one of about 1 000 evening classes and have local tutorial support added to their correspondence study. (The choice of courses will then be much narrower, and will depend on where they live.)

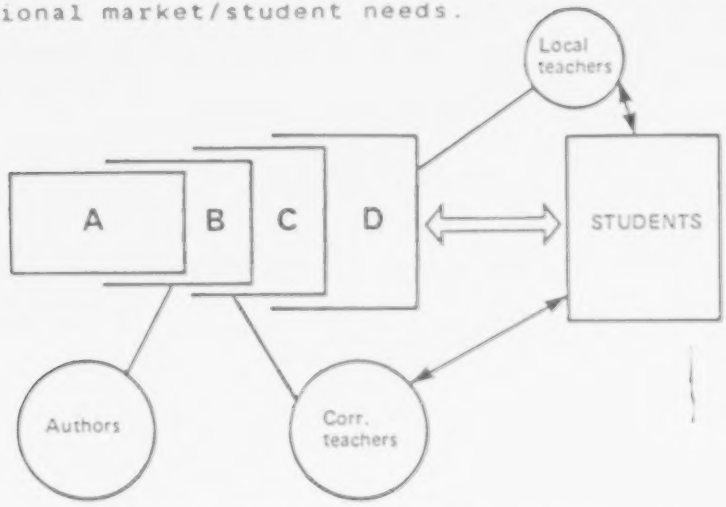
The full time staff of NKS is about 150. Most of the staff, including people with academic background, are engaged in some kind of educational administration, and are not actually teaching the students. The different levels of educational administration are illustrated in the figure (next page):

The editorial and production department deals with the development and preparation of courses, and uses authors or teams of authors on contract for the development of each course.

The administration of course programs includes planning of new courses and maintenance (revisions) of old ones, as well as counselling and supervision of more than 500 correspondence teachers, who are part-time staff, working in their homes and paid according to their actual work-load.

The local class tuition is organized by a local organizer, usually voluntary study organizations or school authorities. The correspondence school has no direct responsibility for the local class tuition itself, but it supports the local organizers in setting up programs, marketing, enrollments, among other things.

Thus, the strength of the correspondence school is not a big academic full-time staff. It is the effective administration and distribution of educational programs, together with its flexibility to establish, increase, decrease and terminate various course programs according to developments in the educational market/student needs.



A: General administration
B: Editorial and production department
C: Course programs, counselling and correspondence tuition
D: Local class administration, and marketing

The regional college

The typical regional college in Norway will have between 300 and 1200 students and a full-time staff of 40-100 people, the majority of which will be academics responsible for the teaching of students. Some of the colleges will offer programs in several subject areas, others are specialized engineering colleges, teachers' training colleges, etc. Each of them is responsible for the actual offer and the development of post-secondary education in their field and in the region where the college is located, but the students may come from other parts of the country, as well. The colleges cooperate through a regional board, and to some extent they also cooperate with other colleges on a national level.

The regional colleges in Norway are fairly small, and have limited resources, as you would expect in a country with about 4 million people altogether. Still, they face challenges of great importance in the development of their regions, making knowledge available and offering educational opportunities to people in the local communities.

The possibilities of distance education have, with few exceptions, been almost neglected - both by universities and regional colleges in Norway. However, the awareness has been growing lately, and quite a few colleges have made their first experience with students outside the campus - some of them have

also experimented with various forms of distance study. Most of the activities are, however, extremely "small-scale", with only 20-50 students. When more students are involved, so is often also a correspondence school. I would like to describe two examples of this kind of cooperation.

THE ANIMALS ASSOCIATED

Example 1

When NKS in 1981 decided to extend its course program to include courses on the post-secondary level, we chose to cooperate with one of the biggest and best established of the regional colleges, Rogaland distriktshøgskole (RDH). RDH offers a 2 years' study program in business administration. This program contains more than 20 subject modules of 2 credits each, and there is an examination for each module. 20 credits are attached to compulsory subjects (10 modules - equals 1 full study year), another 20 credits have to be selected from optional subject modules.

About 10% of the applicants were enrolled as full-time students every year at RDH for this study program. In addition, some part-time students were enrolled, living in the town Stavanger where the college is situated. So, the need for the program was much greater than the college was able to meet.

In 1981, an agreement was made between RDH and NKS to develop a distance education program to cover the 10 compulsory subject modules of the RDH business administration program. The first 2 modules were launched in the autumn 1982, the last ones are just finished.

The correspondence courses have been developed by the academic staff of RDH, assisted by professional editors at NKS. In some cases existing text-books are used, but in most of the courses new text-books and other components have been developed to fit the curricula of the program and the examinations required. The new text-books, exercises etc. are used also by ordinary full-time students at RDH, and by other colleges as well.

The courses are then marketed by NKS to individual students all over the country. Local classes are organized in cooperation with study organizations. The students enroll with NKS in accordance with ordinary conditions and fees, with the same state subsidy of fees as other correspondence students get in Norway.

As correspondence teachers, the RDH staff is again engaged by NKS. Initially, this was sufficient, but with increasing student numbers teachers are also recruited from other regional colleges on a part-time basis.

Students who complete their correspondence courses are allowed to sit for the ordinary RDH examinations. Examinations are arranged locally at fixed times all over the country. The full responsibility of the examinations, except for the practical arrangements, rests with RDH.

So far, this cooperative distance study program has been quite successful. Already, there are more students in the distance program than there are full-time students on campus. However, a couple of problems are not solved yet.

The first problem is that while the student numbers of the first two modules have exceeded 2 000 since the program was launched in 1982, the enrollments for the following modules are increasing much more slowly. We hope this will change this year, when all the modules are developed, and can be presented as a whole "package". The aim is to offer a complete post-secondary study program at a distance, not only fragments of a program.

The second problem is the regionalized structure of post-secondary education in Norway. Frankly, the other regional colleges with study programs similar to RDH, dislike the nation-wide character of the distance study program of RDH and NKS. NKS operates on at national level, and nobody has objections to our national enrollment of individual correspondence students. However, when we organize local classes, we sometimes meet objections and obstructions from other colleges and the Regional Boards of post-secondary education. We have tried to propose cooperation with other colleges as well, for instance regarding examinations, but without success. However, a few academics from other colleges are engaged as correspondence teachers. We hope the attitudes of the other colleges will be more relaxed when they get more accustomed to the program and to this type of cooperation between colleges and correspondence schools.

Example 2

The next project was initiated in 1983, by an agreement between NKS and a regional teachers' training college, Telemark lærerhøgskole (TLH). Microcomputers were flooding into Norwegian compulsory schools, and there was an urgent need of teacher training programs. TLH was establishing a half year study program (full-time, on campus). NKS added to TLH's resources by funding 50% of a lecturer in computer education. This lecturer should also be responsible for the development of a distance study program in informatics, equivalent to the TLH on-campus program.

Authors were engaged both from TLH staff and from outside, and the editorial and production resources of NKS were again used in the project. This time we invited all the Norwegian teachers' training colleges to appoint representatives to sit in a reference group for the project, and 13 colleges did so. All the study material developed for the informatics program has been discussed in the reference group.

The informatics study program for teachers was launched in the autumn 1984. We invited the teachers' training colleges to be responsible for the local classes and the examinations in their region, and 6 colleges agreed to cooperate the first year.

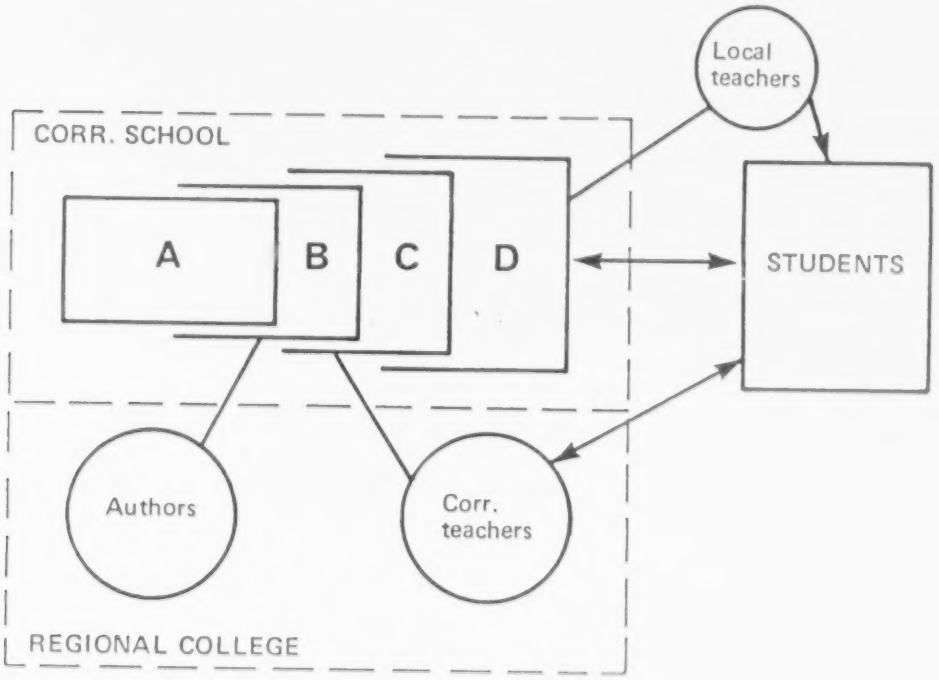
It is too early to evaluate the experience with this distance

study program. There has been some practical problems - getting the course material ready in time, organizing the use of microcomputers, etc. Nearly 200 students enrolled, and have just been sitting for their examination.

We have succeeded this time in involving several colleges in the cooperation. As institutions, they are also more actively supporting their distant students than what is the case with RDH in the first example. Therefore, there are more local adaptation and variation. But I also have a feeling that in some cases the colleges may limit the number of enrollments to lower student numbers than we would have done. This may be wise in the initial phase of the project, but may become a problem for the total economy of the program in the future.

DISCUSSION

The philosophy behind the model of cooperation I have described, is the combination of existing resources for distance study. It can be illustrated by adding to the figure describing the organization of a correspondence school:



The correspondence school has the competence and the administrative apparatus for distance education, with far more experience and efficiency than any college. Combined with the academic recources of the college (or the colleges), it is possible to develop and maintain distance study programs of high quality as regards academic standard, distance study methods and practical administration and distribution.

Norway is too small a country to establish an Open University with sufficient economy of scale. Small-scale programs on a regional level exist, and will continue in the future. The cooperation model described in this paper may be an important supplement when the target groups are reasonably numerous on a national level.

The economy and rationality of the model depends on the combination of existing resources. The use of academic resources from the colleges for development and distance teaching makes it possible to offer post-secondary distance study throughout the country without establishing a new institution, and without engaging many full-time academics at the correspondence school. The economy of scale connected with the administrative resources of the correspondence school, makes it reasonably cheap to establish new programs, adding only development costs and the costs of correspondence teaching.

The model gives much greater flexibility than what is possible with only campus-based education. New study programs can be developed and offered to hundreds or thousands of students all over the country at a very short notice. The same flexibility is attained in limiting and terminating programs when they are not needed any more.

Compared to similar models of cooperation between distance - and campus-based educational institution (for instance the DIFF model in Germany and the FlexiStudy model of National Extension College of the UK), the Norwegian model makes use of both the course development experience and the educational administration resources of the correspondence school. So, the students are actually enrolled with the correspondence school. Compared to the situation in other correspondence courses, the services that are "bought" from persons outside the school itself, are now delivered by a cooperating institution, the regional college.

The future will show wether the relationships of this model of cooperation will be stable. It seems to work well at the moment, and it may be that we have established a really symbiotic association. But only if the institutions are able to refine and to develop further both the model and the study programs, and to do it together, can we say with confidence that the model works and will last. If we manage to do that, I believe that we have established an effective and powerful instrument in the field of post-secondary education in Norway.